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IN-FLIGHT MEXICO INTERVIEW

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Q: Can you talk what you saw and heard in Mexico that (inaudible) and your assessment of how grave the threat to national security is along the border region?

ADM MULLEN: You were breaking up on this. Let me – I think I’ve got it, but if I don’t answer the entirety of your question, come back. This is, obviously, the first visit there for me since I’ve been chairman and it’s the end of a week of going through what I’m certain will be a very important region for us, clearly ending up in Mexico.

What strikes me – and I met with – basically, I just met with the military leadership – actually, the secretary of defense, who’s General Galvan and then the secretary of the navy who is General Saynez and their staffs. And I also spent some time at the war college and I’ll come back to that because I think that’s important. And the – what I find is, the military-to-military relationship is the best I’ve ever seen it, and I’ve been there several times in recent years – significant opportunity to continue to cooperate and to focus very heavily on the needs with respect to the border.

And the kinds of capabilities they need, from an intelligence piece, and equipping piece and also, quite frankly, just sharing a lot of lessons we’ve learned in terms of how we’ve developed several of the capabilities over the last three to four years in our counterinsurgency efforts as we have fought terrorist networks. There are an awful lot of similarities. So essentially, it was to emphasize that, and also, it’s very evident that President Calderon has made, I believe, a courageous decision to really go after this, and that’s one of the reasons the violence level is so high, and that was pointed out to me by each of the individuals I met with.

And that’s one of the reasons that there certainly is, you know, a growing concern, because there really is an urgent need to get after this and the leadership in Mexico has taken it on. And obviously, it affects us because of the border and because of the relationship between our countries. And so from the military perspective, I was looking to understand what their problems were from their perspective and see what we could do to help. Does that get at what you asked me? (Pause.)

Q: (inaudible)

ADM MULLEN: I actually didn’t – I just really didn’t get into that, I mean, with them. And it’s – obviously, it’s a high-enough level that we’re all very concerned and the violence level continues to rise. And it is, for the most part, focused on the North, you know, from a Mexico perspective, and obviously on the border we have – on our border with them, although it’s not exclusively just there.

Q: What specifically do you think the Mexicans need from the United States? Have they been actively seeking US assistance?

ADM MULLEN: Again, as I talked a little bit about it in answering Anne's question, but clearly, the intelligence support capabilities, the tactics that we have that have evolved, for us, in our fight against networks in the terrorist world, but there's a direct application. Certainly, the kind of surveillance, reconnaissance doctrine that we use and that has evolved – so there are all those kinds of things. And we've been working with them to cooperate with them as they've evolved. And you know, they're evolving pretty rapidly in terms of addressing this threat to them, as well.

Q: Is that to say that they need to start employing some of the counter-insurgency methods that the US has been using in Iraq and Afghanistan, specifically unmanned drones and other ISR assets?

ADM MULLEN: Yeah, I think ISR – that kind of capabilities is certainly a big part of it. But it's not – I mean, I'm obviously limited to the military link here; there's a number of our agencies that are working with them to assist in this strategy and to cooperate with them in this regard – the Border Patrol service, the DEA, Homeland Security. So clearly, there's a fairly far-reaching area of support and cooperation, and those are – as best I can tell in sitting down with our embassy – those are all very much ongoing and have been for some time.

Q: You mentioned before Colombia, and US assistance to Colombia and Colombia's experience with fighting drug cartels. Did you talk about that with your Mexican counterparts?

ADM MULLEN: In fact, I didn't talk extensively about that. We talked briefly in terms of, you know, the progress that Colombia has made. And there are lessons that they have learned that I thought the – but that's also something that the Mexicans have been – (inaudible, background noise).

Q: Do you think there is a model there in terms of assistance given to Colombia that could be applied to Mexico in the future?

ADM MULLEN: Well, one of the real important areas of assistance for Colombia was the consistency of training support for a number of years. Also, the resourcing level of assistance, which was predictable to a great extent, that allowed the capabilities to be developed there – and we did spend some time in this visit talking about the Merida Initiative and it's a very important initiative to the Mexicans. They've made that very clear.

And that's a three-year initiative for fiscal years '08, '09 and '10 where we're working hard to push as much, if not all, of the Department of Defense. But it's some \$1.4 billion over three years. We're all working very hard – different departments working very hard to move the capabilities that are desirable inside those resources to Mexico as quickly as we can. (Pause.)

Q: You mentioned that you visited the war college; can you talk about that a little bit and describe the extent of training assistance the military is providing?

ADM MULLEN: Well, actually I visited the naval war college in Mexico City and what struck me about that were the – and I guess I spoke for a few minutes and then took a lot of questions. What struck me about the questions is, they were all focused on this crisis. There was, I think, of all the questions, there was one question about the navy in the naval war college, so that said a lot to me about the entire military being focused on this challenge.

And actually, I was very encouraged by that and the quality of the questions. And in fact, some of the questions were the same questions you're asking – where can we, you know, work together? The question arises about the shared responsibility with respect to weapons, which are coming out of the United States and into Mexico and the money, which is being laundered and passing through both the United States and Mexico. So most of the – and then, some of the specific lessons in this kind of warfare – irregular warfare – and the capabilities that we have developed in the United States that I think would allow us to cooperate against this particular threat. And the end – I'm sorry – the end of your – there was another – you had a question?

Q: Describe the extent of the training assistance that is be offered or considered there in terms of military training assistance?

ADM MULLEN: Well, I mean, there's been mil-to-mil training for some time, and fairly extensive mil-to-mil exchanges and training, particularly on the navy side, and that really involves our Navy and our Coast Guard, extensively, with them. And then there has been training evolving from the perspective of their army. And again, I met with the head of SEDENA, who is their secretary of defense, General Galvan, and he is very enthusiastic about continuing and increasing that training. And that's about all the detail I'd like to give. (Pause.)

Q: Allegedly corrupt Mexican officials have reached very power positions in the anti-drug fight, as US cooperation increases do you have concerns about leaks to the cartels and how will you try to prevent that in military to military cooperation?

ADM MULLEN: I think it's been pretty clear that President Calderon has taken very significant steps with respect to committing his military to this fight and, in response to the level of corruption that exists in other places in his government, in the police force. So the best I can tell – I mean, anybody would be concerned about leaks – the best I can tell, the leadership in Mexico is aware of the problem and is addressing it. (Pause.)

Q: Is this going to be a plan Mexico that ends up being the same scope and duration and scale as plan Colombia, billions of dollars over more than a decade?

ADM MULLEN: Not for me to decide or know. I certainly – as we look at supporting our friends, one of the things that's very clear to me is that the support needs to be more than one year, typically, and it needs to be predictable. So I certainly wouldn't expect it to be – the first program was a three-year program, '08, '09, and '10, and then, obviously, there'll be decisions that need to be made in this administration about how far, how much, you know, how long and

what the specifics are. That's really not been decided yet, and I don't have a lot more to say with respect to that. Yeah. (Pause.)

Q: Follow up on the corruption question; won't the concern for leaks limit the amount of cooperation that you can give them?

ADM MULLEN: Certainly, the concern for that was very specifically expressed. And again, I think the leadership in Mexico understands that and have taken steps to, certainly, minimize and/or eliminate it. They're very aware of the problem, and with that in mind, certainly, we are. And given that, I think that's an important place to be as we look at how we're going to exchange information and assist. But I haven't seen anything in the military side at this point which would indicate that that's a limiting factor, in terms of what's happening. (Pause.)

Q: What discussions you may have had about Venezuela's influence and if you noticed a change in attitude from the countries about their concerns?

ADM MULLEN: Most of the discussions in all of the countries – and this was Brazil, Chile, Peru, Colombia and Mexico – most of the focus was on the relationship between the United States and the individual country. Certainly, there were some discussions of concern with respect to Venezuela, but I thought, actually, most of them were very reasonable and understandable. And there seemed to be an understanding that that was – you know, that there is a regional requirement for all the countries, including Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador – you know, all the countries – to figure out how to work together and live together in the region, and that became the essence, I think, of most of the discussions. (Pause.)

Q: What specifically is the US providing Mexico now in terms any kind of support particularly in terms of surveillance, reconnaissance, ISR, SIGINT, anything of that nature?

ADM MULLEN: Well, I'd leave it in the broad category that you just described, in terms of ISR support, which is important. From the military side, more specifically, I think probably heavier just in the intelligence exchange, but in recognition that there are additional assets that could be brought to bear across the full ISR spectrum. But the other piece is, you know, tactically, how we have attacked network kinds of problems and the entirety of the capabilities that bring that to bear, without getting into any specifics that, you know, that we're sharing at this point.

Q: Are any US assets now over flying Mexican territory?

ADM MULLEN: I would not, as I don't, anywhere in the world, talk about our operations and the details of the those operations. (Pause.)

Q: Were US troops on the border discussed in any fashion?

ADM MULLEN: Actually, not in my discussions at all on this trip. (Pause.)

Q: Near term assistance, most of the Merida Aid is long-term, is that correct?

ADM MULLEN: Well, actually the '08 money in the Merida Initiative was approved in December, so there's considerable movement right now to try to generate equipment out of the Department of Defense portion of the Merida Initiative in '08 and get it there as rapidly as possible, and so that's not long-term at all.

The '09 money, as I understand it, is in the omnibus bill, hasn't been approved yet, at least, unless it got approved today. And again, we'll try to get that as rapidly as possible, but that's obviously going to take a little bit longer. And actually, they expressed some frustration with our FMS system – that's not new – and they have an urgent need. We all have a sense of urgency about this, so we're going to push pretty hard to deliver that capability to deliver that capability as rapidly as possible, to include things like helicopters. (Pause.) Okay, yeah, thank you.

(END)